The Congregationalist

COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE
JUN 29

Snow-capped mountains and sun-ripened orange groves make a startling contrast in the beautiful San Gabriel Valley.

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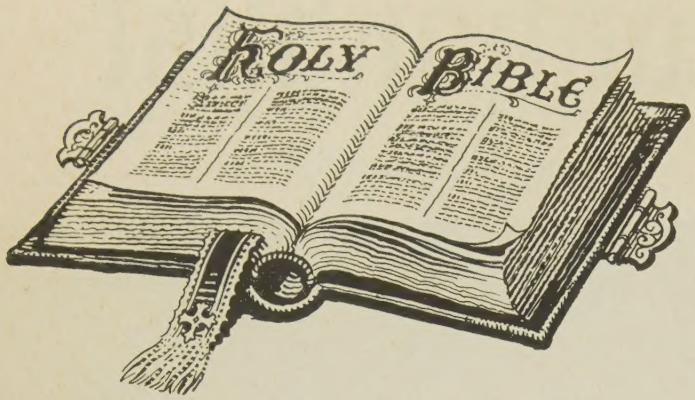
"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." — Galatians 5:1



THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

Some Tests From the New Testament

Dr. Henry David Gray, Hartford, Connecticut

Constitution (Webster's Unabridged)
1. An authoritative ordinance, regulation, or enactment; especially . . . one affecting ecclesiastical doctrines or discipline.
2. The fundamental organic law or principles of government . . . embodied in written documents; also, a written instrument embodying such organic law, and laying down fundamental rules and principles for the conduct of affairs.

Soon we shall be asked to consider a "constitution" for the "United Church of Christ". BEFORE that document is presented to us we do well to consider prayerfully and thoughtfully the basic principles of Church life in the New Testament. Our Congregational forefathers believed they were "completing the Reformation" when they applied to Church "polity" the principles which they found in the New Testament. And if it be said that "We do not live in the first century," let us add that neither did our Congregational forefathers live in the first century. Furthermore, the revelation of God in our Lord Jesus Christ is normative for men of all centuries who sincerely call themselves Christians.

What then are the tests from the New Testament?

Face to Face

First and above all else, the New Testament calls us to worship and serve God as He makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. Test any proposed constitution by this norm. Does it follow the Scriptures by putting aside anything and everything which presumes to *tell men what to believe?* Does it trust wholly to God's making Himself known to men *directly and personally?* Does it put barriers between men and their Maker, in creed or in aught else? Does it call men to repent and believe the gospel face to face with God, each responsible to Him and to Him alone? Does it ask us to serve an organization or does it invite us to serve God?

Institution or Inspiration?

Second, the New Testament bears witness to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of persons and Churches. Does the constitution lay claim to institutional authority, or does it trust in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in persons and Churches individually? Does it indicate that individual persons and Churches cannot be trusted to find and follow the leading of God's Spirit? (For example, does it set up standard procedures which would give authority concerning worship, the ministry, education, or any part of the Church's work to committees, boards, or other bodies outside the particular Church?) Does it put its trust in organizational efficiency, size, and power, or does it show trust in the Spirit-awakened zeal and love of the responsible Christian man in the responsible fellowship of the particular Church?

In a word, is the prime principle of the constitution trust in organization *or* trust in God?

The New Testament Church

Third, the New Testament portrays the Church as the covenanted fellowship of those who dare to be followers of Jesus Christ, gathered into particular Churches in each community, believing themselves to be one in fellowship with all people who shared their common allegiance to Christ as Lord.

In the New Testament the word "Church" always means either the particular Church in a given community, or else the universal fellowship of all Christ's followers past, present, and future.

Does the constitution use the word "Church" in the way in which the word is used in the New Testament? Or are we told that the New Testament usage is not suitable for our day? Does the constitution accept the Scriptural principle that "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? Or does it "recognize" a "Church" only by organizational rules by claim of churchly authority?

Is the constitution as inclusive as the gospel? Is it widely inclusive enough to welcome our Quaker brethren as fellow-Christians? Or does it set up sacramental standards which would exclude them?

Peace and Purity

Fourth, the New Testament calls men to repentance and faith. Jesus said to a forgiven person, "Go and sin no more". Paul urged the Corinthians to guard the peace and purity of life in their Church. Does the constitution provide "national" standards for Church membership? Or does it completely omit all reference to Church membership, thereby clearly recognizing that Church membership is a personal relationship to God and a covenant relationship to a particular Church? Does the constitution *provide any judicial system?* (whether optional or required is not of significance in relation to Biblical principle). Does the constitution provide *any* means by

which responsibility for the peace and purity of the particular Church can be passed off to any other body? Or does it prohibit such reference to "higher bodies" in recognition of the inescapable responsibility to God Himself which is central in Scripture and in Congregational usage?

Advice and Counsel or . . .?

Fifth, the New Testament portrays the counselling together of Churches to seek the mind of Christ and give advice in time of need. Does the constitution provide for mere "congregations" which shall support the program of denomination as a whole, on the pretext that the denomination is THE CHURCH? Or does it provide for *Churches* which shall meet together for advice and counsel? Does the constitution *provide for control over the Churches by* the General Synod, Conferences, or other bodies? Does the constitution indicate that "counsel" really means "requirements"? Or does it explicitly declare that "counsel" has as much weight as it has worth, NO less and no more?

"Congregation" or Church?

Sixth, the New Testament provides many examples of a sisterly relationship between Churches, but no instance of the authority of one Church (even Jerusalem) over other Churches. Does the constitution provide for a name true to the New Testament principle of sisterly relationship of Churches? Or does it indicate an idea like that which obtains in some church bodies wherein the "congregation" is simply a "unit" of the national organization?

Committee-Controlled or God-Directed?

Seventh, the New Testament tells us that Churches, individually, ordained leaders, and that the members themselves took part in the "laying on of hands". *Does the constitution claim* for the General Synod, Conference or any other body *any authority* to ordain, license, call dismiss, install, recognize, or otherwise *oversee* the pastor-Church relationship? Or does it faithfully follow the New Testament principle that this precious relationship is the inalienable choice of a pastor and a people acting under the direct guidance of God, sought in prayer and exercised only in response to His leading? Does the constitution suggest a distrust of the principle of Spirit-directed pastor-Church relationships, claiming that the guidance of the committee (General Synod, Conference or other body) is more to be depended upon than the guidance of God in Church meeting?

Wider Bodies As Agencies

Eighth, the New Testament Churches appear to have been gathered in each particular community by spontaneous groups or by selfless leaders, and the subsequent association of the Churches with each other appears to have taken place in the same way. Does the constitution recognize the wider bodies of Christian fellowship which the Churches have created as agencies for wider work as the Churches commission them to do, or does it undertake to organize the Churches geographically?

The Word Made Flesh

Ninth, the New Testament proclaims the Word made flesh as the Word of God which shall redeem the world. Does the constitution acknowledge the Living Word as the *ultimate authority, the Word made flesh today* by the inward illumination of the Spirit of God at work in the heart of each individual Christian, and in the meeting of each individual Church of Christ? Or does it indicate that our confidence is to be put in a super-church?

Lay Ministry

Tenth, the New Testament bears ample testimony to the ministry *of those who were not ordained.* Is the matter of lay ministry in the Churches recognized as an inevitable consequence of New Testament Christianity? Or does the constitution tend to limit the ministry to the "clergy"?

Faith, Freedom, Fellowship OR . . . ?

Finally, the New Testament sets forth principles of faith, life, and work; it is the record of what God did through men responsive to His call. Is the constitution a simple, straightforward statement of Christian principles which calls us to unite in diversity, to adventure for Christ? Or does it cramp and confine the free Spirit of God in Christ's Churches?

Congregational Bookshelf

Rev. Royal G. Davis, Los Angeles, California

No contemporary Congregationalist has written about theology on such a large scale or in such systematic fashion as Nels F. S. Ferré, now professor at Andover, our oldest Congregational seminary. The fifth volume of his theology has been recently published under the title CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN (Harpers $3.75). Earlier books dealt with faith and reason, the Christian understanding of God, the problem of evil, and the foundations of social ethics. This one gives Dr. Ferré's ideas about Christ.

The professor tries to do justice to all sides of this especially important and controversial subject. He carefully examines the teachings of the Church Fathers and decisions of the ecumenical councils. To this historical study he adds valuable insights derived from modern theologians. One admires the breadth of interest and depth of feeling the Andover theologian reveals. He resembles the defenders of that seminary's progressive orthodoxy of a century ago. Firmly rooted in the past, he seems unafraid of the present or future.

Christology means a reasoned presentation of the meaning and majesty of Jesus Christ. Ferré has failed at this crucial point. None of the compelling power of the Man of Nazareth shines through the pages to inspire us. However careful his judgments or wide his reading, Ferré is dull, Dull, DULL. Like most ecumenical theologians, he so laboriously attempts to relate himself to ancient writers and traditional Catholic councils that he misses both the genuine vigor of evangelistic orthodoxy and the questing spirit of Christian liberalism.

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OUR HISTORIC FEAR OF ECCLESIASTICISM

Rev. Howard Conn, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Congregationalists have never claimed to be the one true church, but have worked gladly with people of other denominations to further Christian cooperation and unity. Why then should some of us now hold back from the United Church of Christ?

The reasons are several. One important factor is that some of us find that the impulse behind the new United Church is not cooperative goodwill but a resurgence of the ecclesiasticism from which Congregationalists long ago freed themselves. We are interested in a drawing together of Protestants to affirm a basic devotion to Jesus Christ, but we cannot support a movement aimed at exalting an institutional church as the necessary expression of that devotion.

Freedom From Superstructures

The Pilgrims came to America to get away from superstructures. They affirmed the local congregation as a fully adequate "outcropping" of the invisible fellowship of Christ's people. Each local Church is to ordain its own pastor, govern its own affairs, make its own witness, and look to the presence of the Eternal Christ in its midst. It is Jesus who guides and inspires. No other organizational structure is Scripturally recognized.

But whatever safeguards the United Church may propose to guarantee local freedoms, these are secondary to its intent to subordinate local congregations to a real, visible, ecclesiastical superstructure called "The United Church." Let me be specific.

First, as to theological foundations, our seminaries are now teaching young ministers that we cannot know much about the real historic Jesus behind the Gospels, so that the impact of the New Testament is to show the importance of the developing Church in the early centuries. This undercuts dedication to Jesus and elevates loyalty to the group. What the most ardent first century Christians claimed for the Church becomes the norm rather than what objective scholarship indicates Jesus to have advocated. We liberals think that Jesus put the emphasis on ethical conduct, but contemporary theologians stress the acceptance of the Risen Christ as Lord of His Church. If obedience to the "Lordship of Christ in His Church" is stressed, then we are really being asked to be obedient to the clergy and theologians who today dominate the institution. This is a critical shift in Congregational emphasis from the past seventy years.

Freedom, a Right or a Privilege?

Secondly, in polity, is our freedom now to be granted us by a constitution? If so, what a document grants it can later retract. Historically, we have held our freedoms to be inherent in our relation to Christ, and not granted by any Council or organization. Are we to abandon this inherent claim to freedom, and accept liberty as only a constitutional guarantee within an ecclesiastical superstructure?

Next, in actual practice this resurgent emphasis on "The Church" has resulted in a shift from Jesus to the institution, from the laity to the clergy, from the local to the national superstructure. Here are some instances of this shift.

Over the past thirty years our State Conferences have grown enormously in staff and function. Superintendents wield power they never had before.

The Council for Christian Social Action makes pronouncements as to what constitutes the Christian position on controversial political issues, as for example its January 1959 statement urging recognition of Red China. Such pronouncements suggest that Congregationalists favor positions on which local Churches have never been consulted. The experts speak for the man in the pew.

Shall The Superstructure Rule?

The national publications justify the decision to form the United Church on the ground that General Council sessions have repeatedly voted to proceed with the union. Such statements are true, but they overlooked the more crucial fact that the issue has not been referred to congregations, excepting back in 1948 for an advisory vote that failed to reach the announced quota. Those of us who believe in the local Church as the center of religious experience reply that the votes of a thousand councils have not the authority to put a fellowship out of existence. Yet ecclesiastics want to claim for them such power, and to intimidate local church members to accept without question the authority of the higher councils.

The meetings of Associations, State Conferences, and General Council no longer reflect the concerns of people from the Churches but are promotional meetings at which speakers from our national boards occupy the time. Very little opportunity is given for lay questions and discussion. We are being marshalled from the top, rather than arriving at united action from any common concern of people in our pews.

This is an age of centralization and consolidation of power into centers of influence. Most denominations are structurally geared for such consolidations. The Congregationalists historically are not. Our distinctive contribution to the growing witness of Christianity in the Space Age ought to be a dogged insistence on the unique importance of the individual under God, and a friendly resistance to the ecclesiasticism which seeks influence for the clergy and the institution. We are willing to work with everyone, but our destiny is to stand out against a super-Protestantism that emulates the authority of a powerful Romanism. What a tragedy that our people are blind to this fundamental issue, and are letting their laudable goodwill be used for the very kind of ecclesiasticism from which our forefathers became free.

A Real and Present Danger

Many Congregationalists apparently do not consider this ecclesiasticism a danger, but let them at least seek to understand why some of us regard it as such. The proposed obliteration of Congregational individualism into an ecclesiastical superstructure poses problems that should at least be recognized by every member of our fellowship. Those who are impatient with the slow growth of the mustard seed can join other denominations structurally organized, for group action from the top, but let them not try to carry Congregationalism into an alien pattern.

Some of us recall that Jesus resisted the temptation to accept all the kingdoms of the world in return for a momentary abandonment of His principles. We want to bring the world into a closer walk with God, but we are dedicated to pursuing this objective in good will according to our traditional principles of voluntarism and individualism, just as other denominations pursue the same goal according to their pledged insights. There is room for all in the family of God without Congregationalism abandoning the distinctive witness which the world needs in this period of collectivism.

"LET FREEDOM RING"

The Annual Meeting, June 30, July 1 and 2, 1959

On Tuesday morning June 30, delegates and visitors from free Churches from Maine to California will assemble at the First Congregational Church, Los Angeles, for the fourth Annual Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches of the United States. Their very presence at this meeting and the concern they show for the cause of religious freedom will deepen in every heart the dedication to spreading the gospel of Christ as free, gathered Churches.

Advance Registration Recommended

The Credentials Committee will begin registering the delegates and visitors at 8:30, but this work will be expedited greatly if those who attend will send in the *Delegates' Certificates* and *Registration Applications* which have been mailed out to the member Churches, to Rev. Leonard H. Maunder, 511 North Seventh Avenue, Maywood, Illinois, with checks for the fees made out to *Credentials Committee.* Information about the classifications will be found on the back of the cards.

Glimpses of the Program

At 9:30 the meeting will be called to order by the Moderator, Dr. Henry David Gray of Hartford, Connecticut, and Rev. George E. Mitchell of Terre Haute, Indiana, will offer the constituting prayer.

At the first business session, after the usual presentation of reports and adoption of agenda, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Dr. Harry R. Butman of Los Angeles will make his report, and present for action the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings, which have been submitted to the Churches in mimeographed form.

Each morning's session will be brought to a close by the "Chaplain's Half Hour," with hymns, Scripture, prayer and devotional message. Luncheon will be followed by community singing and informal addresses.

The Tuesday afternoon session will begin with the Moderator's Address, and the business meeting will include reports from the Commissions on Women's Work, Missions and Church Extension, Christian Education, the Ministry, and Publications. Seminars, always an important feature of National Association meetings, will meet from 3:50 to 5:00. Constitutional Issues and news regarding the merger will be discussed from 5:10 to 5:30. Special music has been arranged for the dinner hour.

In the evening the programs will be featured by a panel discussion on "Let Freedom Ring". Rev. Bruce H. Masselink will present the aspect "In Personal Living," Mr. Jan Erteszek "In Daily Life" and Mrs. George Berkaw "In Church Life". Written questions from the audience will be answered by the speakers.

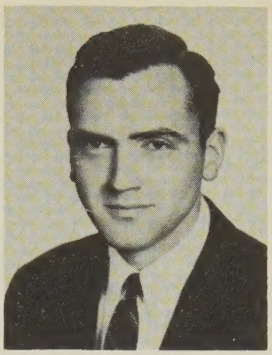
The Wednesday Sessions

The Wednesday morning business meeting will be devoted to reports of the Committee on Legal Structure, the Nominating Committee, the Credentials Committee, and the Editor of THE CONGREGATIONALIST. The second session of the seminars will extend from 10:10 to 11:30, and again the Chaplain's Half Hour will bring the morning to a close.

Messages from the five newly-organized member Churches, — Anaheim and Granada Hills, California, Mayflower Church of Oklahoma City, Mayflower Church

Continued on Column 2

WINS SAVOY AWARD



Arthur A. Rouner, Jr.

The Committee which offered the Savoy Tercentenary Award, commemorating the Tercentenary of the Savoy Platform of 1658, announces that first prize has been awarded to Reverend Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., pastor of the First Congregational Church of Williamsburg, Massachusetts, for his book "The Congregational Way". This book will be published in the near future. Second prize goes to Mrs. Sydney G. Abbot of Westford, Massachusetts, for her manuscript "The Congregational Christian Fellowship of the United States".

The readers of the manuscripts submitted were Professor Matthew Spinka, Ph.D., Reverend L. Wendell Fifield, D.D., and Reverend Henry David Gray, Ph.D.

The winner of the award is a graduate of Harvard College and Union Theological Seminary, and spent one year of study at New College, Edinburgh. He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, the older son of Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Rouner. Mr. Rouner was ordained in the Cadman Memorial Congregational Church, Brooklyn, in 1954, and has been the pastor in Williamsburg since that year. Further announcement regarding the publication of the book will be made in a later issue of THE CONGREGATIONALIST.

Continued from Column 1

of Grand Rapids, and Faith Community Church of North Royalton, Ohio, will be given after luncheon, and at 1:30 special sessions will include discussions on "The Town and Country Church," led by Rev. Arthur W. Tiffin of Tarentum, Pennsylvania, and "The Friends of the National Association" led by Executive Secretary Neil H. Swanson, Jr. Free time that afternoon will be used by many for trips to points of interest.

Last But Not Least

The final day, Thursday, will find the morning business sessions devoted to seminar reports. The 1960 budget will be presented at 10:10 by the Chairman of the Executive Committee. That noon the after-luncheon speaker will be Dr. L. Wendell Fifield, Chairman from 1950 to 1954 of the General Council Committee on Free Church Polity and Christian Unity. At 2:00 the Executive Secretary's Report will be given, new officers will be elected, and the Nominating Committee and Credentials Committee for 1960 will be chosen.

The devotional services for this day will be the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered at 11:15 by the host pastor, Dr. James W. Fifield Jr., and the closing devotional service at 3:30 in charge of Rev. Raymond A. Waser of Pomona, California.

Detailed information as to the "travel pool" for delegates' expense and other matters will be found in the letter sent to the Churches on May 7, or may be obtained by writing to Rev. Neil H. Swanson, Jr., 176 West Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 3, Wisconsin.

There is no doubt of a large attendance at these meetings, but the important thing is to have as many of our member Churches represented as is possible. Information regarding delegates is contained in the letter to the Churches. The more Churches are represented, the more clearly will the meeting "Let Freedom Ring."

WOMEN'S WORK

COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S WORK HOLDS TWO DAY MEETING

Mrs. George R. Berkaw, Jr., Detroit, Michigan

Seven of the nine members of the Commission on Women's Work of the National Association met in Milwaukee, April 27–28 to plan for their Los Angeles Seminars, initiate a revision of the "Stimulating Suggestions" handbook for 1960 publication, and outline supplementary resource materials for distribution at the Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, June 30–July 2.

Program For the Seminars

First of the seminars will be planned around "Programs with Purpose". Mrs. Robert Collins of Grand Rapids will moderate the panel after a brief meeting conducted by Mrs. Paul A. Quaintance, Chairman of the Commission.

Whether or not you are responsible for planning regular weekly or monthly programs for your group meetings, this treatment of the over-all program of church-women's groups will be of interest. Every aspect, from Devotions to Fund-raising, will receive attention, and there will be ample provision for questions and comments.

"Freedom in Fellowship" is the theme of the second day's seminar, in which all members of the Commission will take part. A Question Box will help to facilitate participation in the discussion.

Those attending the seminars will be greeted by Mrs. Oakes Worl, President of the Women's Fellowship at First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, the host Church, and by some of the leaders of the Southern California Council. Mrs. Walter Vernon, wife of the minister of the Anaheim Church established last year as a mission project, will also be present.

Women's Project News

A telephone call to Dr. Howell D. Davies, Treasurer of the Missionary Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, assures us that there is a growing stream of checks marked for the Women's Project — our Shared Benevolence. These contributions are pooled to provide scholarships for Piedmont College's working students (most of them are!), subscriptions to badly needed scientific and technical journals, and building funds for an auditorium and science building. The boxes of clothing and household goods going to the Thrift Shop are most welcome too. Be sure to wrap and tie them securely, label them clearly: "Thrift Shop, Piedmont College, Demorest, Georgia," — and prepay the freight or postage! Keep your help flowing to this worthy, independent Congregational college, the Women's Project — our Shared Benevolence for 1959.

Vote at the Women's Seminar will determine whether this project will be continued or another missionary project chosen for our special, joint effort in 1960. All the projects approved by the Missionary Society will be listed for consideration.

Will You Be There?

It is hoped that many of our small Churches will be represented at the Annual Meeting and Women's Seminars. (Did you know that a third of the Congregational Churches in the United States have a membership of fewer than 100?) First Congregational Church of Los Angeles is making every effort to make it possible for families with children to attend, by providing facilities for lower grades at the church, and for children past the third grade and on up through the twelfth grade at their youth camp at Cedar Lake. Anyone attending camp must provide his own sleeping bag or bed roll, and a fee of $10 will cover camping and transportation (105 miles each way.)

Since the allotment from the travel pool of the National Association cannot meet the greater part of travel expense for this distance, perhaps some women's groups could hold special benefits to raise part of the expense of delegates. (That's Congregationalism in action — mutual counsel and aid.) The inspiration and refreshment of these meetings merits every effort to make representation possible.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA MEETING

Mrs. Walter J. Vernon, Anaheim, California

Twenty women from eight churches met together on April 23rd for an informal luncheon meeting at the home of Miss Lucy Kimball of Los Angeles.

This "key committee," presided over by Mrs. Walter Jones of Pomona, proposed and considered a possible name which could be used to identify those women of California whose hearts are on the side of continuing Congregationalism, and who have been meeting together periodically over the past two years. The suggested name, "California Council of Congregational Women," will be recommended for approval to local women's groups this month, and will be officially accepted or rejected at the next wider fellowship meeting.

The next such meeting will be held at the Anaheim Community Congregational Church, one of the projects of the Missionary Society of the National Association. The beautiful, shaded lawn of this year-old church will be the setting for this meeting as several hundred women gather for a sack lunch at noon. Devotions by the host minister, the Reverend Walter Vernon, will be followed by a message from Mrs. Paul Quaintance, Chairman of the Commission of Women's Work. There will also be announcements regarding the forthcoming annual meeting of the National Association to be held at the First Congregational Church in Los Angeles on June 30th, July 1st and 2nd.

May I conclude with the editorial comment that this group of key women, representing the spirit of Congregationalism, appear to be enthusiastic, anxious and eager to "Let freedom ring".

(A regular feature of THE CONGREGATIONALIST is this page devoted to the interests of women's organizations in Congregational Churches. Articles for inclusion should be sent to Mrs. Paul A. Quaintance, 408 South Highland Avenue, Los Angeles 36, California.)

The sympathy of all is extended to the Rev. Arthur L. Upton of Thawville, Illinois, whose wife, Mrs. Merribell M. Upton, died suddenly on April 21. Mrs. Upton was a licensed minister and served as Assistant Pastor of the Thawville Church.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Rev. Neil H. Swanson, Jr., Milwaukee

"Concerning The Annual Meeting"

The Annual Meeting of a group such as ours is an important event. We are still a young organization, and we are quite definitely a growing organization. Therefore, there are many decisions which must be made in terms of policies and activities. It is true that such decisions could be made by smaller committees or commissions. But we want every member-Church to feel that it has a voice in helping to shape the organization and the program of our National Association.

Those who have attended previous annual meetings will speak with enthusiasm concerning what wonderful meetings they have been. As I have tried to analyze the reasons for such enthusiastic comments, I have decided that they result from something more than the fine Christian fellowship that we always experience. I think that the delegates have been pleased with these meetings because they have truly had a share in making important decisions.

This is the way it ought to be. This is the way we want to keep it. And, as the plans for this year's Annual Meeting develop, it is clear that once again the delegates will be asked to discuss a number of different recommendations coming from commissions, committees, local Churches, and regional councils. It is an exciting thing to watch the development of constructive and creative ideas as they emerge from the thinking of devoted Congregationalists. It is even more exciting to have a share in the decisions which are made concerning these various ideas.

As samples of what to expect, there will be proposals concerning a new way to handle "pastoral relations," concerning the development of a national youth program, concerning the training and recruiting of ministers, concerning a more effective publications program, concerning the legal structure of the National Association, concerning ways to develop new Churches, and concerning the future of free Churches.

I hope for two things. I hope that every member-Church of our National Association will be represented at this coming Annual Meeting. And I hope that you can be present yourself! There is no better way to catch the spirit of our group than to participate in an Annual Meeting.

News Notes

New Member Church. The First Congregational Church of Avon, Illinois, has voted to become a member of the National Association.

Pastoral Changes. Rev. A Lynn Booth of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, has accepted a call to the First Congregational Church of Hadlyme, Connecticut, and Dr. L. V. Cleveland is now serving the Westminster Hill Congregational Church of Canterbury, Connecticut. Dr. Cleveland is a brother of Rev. Philip J. Cleveland, who served at Westminster Hill from 1942 to 1958.

Michigan Church Receives Deed to Property. On March 25 Dr. Harold Skidmore, Superintendent of the Michigan Congregational Conference, presented to the Arbor Grove Congregational Church of Jackson the deed to its property, which had been purchased by the Conference before this Church was organized. Rev. Nathaniel Skidmore, father of the Superintendent, conducted the worship service and the deed was accepted on behalf of the Church by Mr. Albert Gierow. Rev. Robert Haldane Jr. is pastor.

A Correction. The statement in the May CONGREGATIONALIST (p. 7) that the date for the completion of the Educational Project had been changed was erroneous. This was suggested at the Interim Committee meeting in Detroit on April 6, but the Commission on Women's Work, meeting later in the month, voted not to approve this suggestion. The manuscripts for this contest must therefore be received at the Executive Office of the National Association, 176 West Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 3, Wisconsin, by August 1, 1959.

State and Local Organizations. During April and May, meetings were held by the pro-Congregational organizations in many states, including Illinois, Kansas, New Hampshire, Ohio and Pennsylvania, together with the forming of such an organization in Wisconsin on April 4. Meetings of the Connecticut and Maine groups are scheduled for later in May. Lack of space prevents fuller reports of these meetings in this number of THE CONGREGATIONALIST, but the July issue will carry accounts of them, as well as of the National Association Annual Meeting.

From the Letter Box

Editor: THE CONGREGATIONALIST:

There seems to be a lot of interest on the part of many Protestant ministers in the call that comes from Rome to a great "ecumenical council." In looking forward to this possibility, we can see that if our churches are led by men who cannot think too straight, it could lead to disaster for Protestantism. All such men can see is one great big church. May God help us if this ever comes to pass. If our leaders were trying to unite Protestantism, not in an organic merger but in a spiritual union through which we could all work together, there would be some sense to it.

When polities and power are the chief concerns of church leaders, there isn't much room for God. He is not interested in one big church. Jesus was a humble man while on earth. I believe He likes to see many small churches which are sincerely trying to follow His example, helping one another and helping others find their way to the feet of God. Let's keep our Protestant banner flying high and keep Jesus as the Head of His Church.

GEORGE W. HOPKINS
Fall River, Massachusetts

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OUR DEVOTIONAL COLUMN

Rev. Morten Sorensen, Scarborough, Maine

"I will give him the morning star." Revelation 2:28.

The book of Revelation is a book of symbols, and can be understood only when they are properly interpreted. The verse on which this devotional message is centered uses the "morning star" as a symbol of promise to people who were living in a black night of paganism and caught up in the darkness of apostate Christianity. The Church of Thyatira was a small Church, weak in leadership and influence. It was much troubled by the work of a false prophetess, tempted by the dark, "deep things of Satan," and discouraged by the blackout of the hope of ever reaching to the stature of Christ who had severely reprimanded it for the degenerate condition existing within. But in this darkness, speaking comfort to the faithful ones, stood the One who can see things in their true perspective, giving them a sign of promise, "The Morning Star," which would shine for them in the darkness until "the dayspring from on high" should come.

This was the very same promise which Christ had given to His disciples as the parting message when He said, "Lo, I am with you always".

Now, without fear of being termed a pessimist, I think it can be stated with fair certainty that there is passing over the world at the present time a wave of spiritual darkness which is making many of us disheartened, discouraged, if not despondent. When one contemplates the social agitation, the literary degeneration, the political corruption, and the moral looseness of our time, it is not to be wondered at that one may feel that the end of faith may be approaching. It is difficult for us in this darkness to discern anything which may strike a spark of hope in the heart.

But that thought is a contradiction of the meaning of this passage of our meditation. The time of darkness is not a time to yield to despair and despondency. It is rather the time for a strong faith to exert itself and to peer into the darkness for the sight of the "Morning Star." This is not a time for collapse of faith, it is rather a time for a growth of a calm and rational faith that "God is in His heaven," and while all may not be "right with the world," we of the faith, with our eyes on the Star, can with sober optimism believe that "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise" to drive away the darkness of man's sin and lighten the world with the radiance of His countenance.

So, even in the time of perplexity or of possible disaster which may overtake the world, be not dismayed, look up from the dark valley of the soul to the Star of promise and send out a quiet thought of consecration across the spiritual sky and be assured that the radiant sunshine of the new day of God will flood the earth. Keep your eyes on the "Morning Star".

OUR THREE ORGANIZATIONS

(A vote of the Interim Committee of the Executive Committee of the National Association, on April 6, 1959, reads, ". . . that a brief statement concerning the respective functions of three pro-Congregational national organizations printed occasionally in THE CONGREGATIONALIST might help to answer the questions which are frequently raised in this regard". A part of the following statement is reprinted from THE CONGREGATIONALIST for April 1958.)

There are three groups fighting for the preservation of Congregationalism. They are:

a. The Committee for the Continuation of Congregational Christian Churches.

b. The League to Uphold Congregational Principles.

c. The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.

Some people ask, "Why have three organizations? Why not merge them into one?" Let us look at the functions of these bodies.

The basic purpose of the Continuation Committee is to strive earnestly for the continuance of Congregationalism. The Continuation Committee is composed of individuals, and it has been instrumental in organizing ecclesiastical and legal opposition to the merger.

The League to Uphold Congregational Principles holds that no official is empowered to speak for the Congregational churches on economic and social matters. Only the Churches themselves can so speak. The League is composed of individual Congregational laymen.

The National Association exists primarily for the purpose of providing fellowship between Congregational Churches. The autonomy of the local church and the fellowship of the churches are the two foci of the Congregational ellipse. The functions of the National Association are spiritual and ecclesiastical, and they are quite apart from the purposes of the other two organizations.

The matter of uniting the three bodies has been discussed several times by the leaders of the three groups, and it has been concluded that the jobs are of such distinct and separate natures that it is better to have three organizations working in harmony, than one tightly-knit body. In this way room is provided for many types of people to work for the preservation of Congregationalism.

Each In Its Own Way

In Congregationalism, every local Church is responsible only to God, and under Him to its own constituent members. Likewise these three organizations are responsible only to God and their constituent members.

None of them have control over any of the others. It has long been the genius of Congregationalism that Churches having differing viewpoints in theology can find fellowship together in freedom. In like manner, if the constituent members of any one of these three organizations hold views on any subject which are not widely accepted among the members of the others, that organization, and that one alone, will reflect these views. But the principle behind them all is that of cooperation and fellowship in promoting the cause of keeping our Churches free to act in all matters according to that basic Congregational tenet that every body of Christians is responsible only to God, and under Him to its own constituent members.